

Your Isaiah 9:2 Promise of Hope in Hard Times

You know what I was doing at 4:45 last evening? Setting the flameless candles. At 2:30 p.m., I rushed home from school, changed into work clothes and started pulling Christmas boxes out of the crawl space. (By the way, I took two ibuprofen before going to bed, because it's not smart to go from watching hours of Hallmark movies for a week to doing squats for an hour under the house.)

After pulling down all of the decorations on the hutch and above the row of upper cabinets in the kitchen, I carefully arranged lanterns, miniature sparkly trees, an old pair of black ice skates and the nativity scene. Then it came time to turn on the battery-operated candles Mom had given me in October.

Mom is the master of lighting. In the evening at her house, ambient lighting and candles magically come on by timer and warm every possible space in the house.

But do you know why I set my new candles to come on at 4:45 every night at our house? Because that's when it gets dark.

Kalispell, Montana —one hour south of the Canadian border. We have short days. My Texas friends might truly enjoy their Christmas decorations, with all of the candles and Christmas tree lights, but we *need* the lights. Because at 5:00, for a few months of the year, we kind of feel like we should be putting on our pajamas —except we still have hours of evening left to live and haven't even eaten dinner yet. The tree lights and candles mean more to us in the north, because it's so dark for so long. The dark pulls down your energy to live.

Let's talk about long darkness and dead of winter, then. Because as I was thinking about how precious the Christmas

lighting is for us northerners, I was also thinking about the real darkness pulling down on people I love.

The friend I talked to who is at anniversary No. 1 of burying her husband last year.

The cousin who shopped for housing on Black Friday because she lost everything but her life in the Paradise, California, fire.

My own family, who is figuring out how to do Christmas around the hole left when my aunt went to be with Jesus.

Matt and I and my mother-in-law and her sister sat down with mugs of hot chocolate at about 8:30 last night, with all of the house lights off, so we could enjoy the Christmas tree lights and candles for the first time. During our short days of winter, we'll have all of these warm lights filling the great, long darkness of evening.

This is for our souls, too:

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwell in the lands of the shadow of death, upon them the light has shined" (Isa. 9:2).

Life is Montana in winter.

It's dark here, and it's dark for a long time. We can feel the shadow of death at every turn, but we've seen a great light. I think, though, that we have to choose to "set" the light of Christ, the way I set my flameless candles. When we're grieving or going through a really hard time (or both), we purposefully have to open our Bibles and reach out for the light. We worship, and the great light warms every possible space in our minds and hearts.

So if you feel like all is dark in your life, do something about it. Maybe work hard enough in your spiritual life to

need ibuprofen. Worship the Lord and give Him an open door to bring you hope and peace and help. {eo}

This article originally appeared at .